

OPINION PLUS

Saturday-Sunday, Oct. 25-26, 2014 | Publisher: Taylor Wood Hayes | President: Chuck Henderson | Editor: Eli Pace | Opinion Editor: Jennifer P. Brown

NEW ERA NEWSMAKERS

McConnell makes case for giving GOP Senate control

EDITOR'S NOTE: U.S. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., is locked into a tight re-election campaign against Kentucky Secretary of State Alison Lundergan Grimes. McConnell recently sat down with the New Era Publisher Taylor W. Hayes, Editor Eli Pace and Opinion Editor Jennifer P. Brown to discuss issues important to the southern Pennyrile region, why he thinks voters should give him another term and Washington politics.

Hayes: You know the importance of Fort Campbell to the state, to this community and to our neighbors to the south. Can you protect Fort Campbell from troop reductions while other military installations will see their troop levels reduced?

McConnell: The fundamental problem is the defense sequester. I negotiated the fiscal cliff deal with Joe Biden and the administration insisted on the level of defense sequesters we ended up with. I think it's pretty clear now in the wake of six years of the reality of the world that taking the army down to 450,000 is foolish and not consistent with the security needs of the country.

So beyond Fort Campbell, how much of an Army do you think in general? I don't think 450,000-person military fits the threat ... You look at (ISIS, Syria, Iraq, Russia and Ukraine, Afghanistan), all of that, and you conclude that America leaving power vacuums doesn't work, doesn't work for us and doesn't work for the world. And it's certainly inconsistent with a decision to go down to a 450,000-person military, which even threatens a totally stable, outstanding base like Fort Campbell, particularly.

When you heard rumors of a combat aviation brigade, other rumors, whatever — so your question was what difference does it make, I assume, who gets elected to the Senate? We've had one other party leader in the Senate in our history — Alben Barkley led the Democrats in the 30s and 40s and myself — and I have a better than 50/50 shot at being the majority leader of the Senate next year, not the leader of the minority, which I've been so far.

If the Senate changes hands, you will eliminate the single biggest impediment in Congress to restoring a significant portion of the defense sequester, which will restore a number of cuts that are being made to the Army, which obviously helps Fort Campbell. I can't think of an issue that would not benefit more for having the change that I hope the American people are ready to make this fall than Fort Campbell, and of course, having a Kentucky leader in the Senate for the country.

Fort Campbell is such a spectacular facility anyway. It has a lot going for it, including a lengthy airfield, the 101st, a storied history, but beyond that, the biggest threat overall is the shrinking size of the Army and that is not likely to be reversed unless the Senate changes.

Brown: Where do you stand on Obamacare? Repeal it, alter it, something else?

McConnell: Repeal it. Let me just give you the consequences so far: \$700 billion in Medicare reductions ... We need to remember what Obamacare was all about; it was about the uninsured. It was estimated we had 40 million uninsured in the country, 85 percent of Americans had health insurance, most of it they liked, and 15 percent did not.

Who were the 40 million? About half were young and healthy and thought they were going to live forever ... The other half had a genuine affordability problem. So this was about insurance. And it was about partisanship ... This bill was totally partisan, and the reason it ended up that way was, after the 2008 election, our friends on the other side ... could do whatever they wanted to, and they did it their way. So here's what they did in order to deal with the uninsured — a 2,700-page bill. The subsidies for those who are uninsured paid for by \$700 billion over the next 10 years in Medicare reimbursement reductions to hospitals, nursing homes, home health care and the like; a tax on medical devices, stints, wheelchairs; a tax on health insurance premiums. That's a \$1 trillion hit on the providers of health care and all the rest of us.

On the consumer side, the government is now treating the health insurance industry like a regulated utility, telling them what they can sell. The inevitable result of that is higher premiums, higher copays, higher deductibles.

So people are having to buy insurance after having insurance policies canceled that aren't as good as the ones they used to have and typically don't fit their needs



ZIRCORNIA ALLEYNE | KENTUCKY NEW ERA

In a recent Q&A session with the Kentucky New Era editorial board, U.S. Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell says the best way to protect Fort Campbell from Department of Defense spending cuts is to give Republicans control the Senate, where they will reverse the sequester that is forcing the reductions in troop levels.

because they aren't custom-crafted anymore, they're just set, government-prescribed policies that you can buy ... If I could get rid of it tomorrow, I would.

If you look at Kentucky, the governor, apparently, in this state can unilaterally expand Medicaid. One way of looking at what happened, is Medicare, a program for the elderly, was used as a piggyback to provide health insurance for those who are not old and not poor.

If they were poor, they would be eligible for Medicaid. If they were poor, they would be eligible for Medicare. So they took \$700 billion away from an elderly programs in order to subsidize programs for people who are not old and not poor, but in order to increase the pool for those that are eligible for Medicaid the Supreme Court said that had to be voluntary, so apparently in Kentucky the governor can do that all by himself.

Kynect is a website. That's all it is. With or without Obamacare, any state can have a website and a couple did before. The Medicaid eligible issue, if the state wants to continue it, they can. But the impact on the state is going to be enormous because the federal government, in order to entice the state into expanding Medicaid, picks up the tab for the first three years. Starting in 2017, the 100 percent match goes down ... The state is looking at something like a \$250 million problem when the 100 percent match goes away.

Sorry for the lengthy answer, but I think it is a huge, huge mistake.

Pace: What core principles are so important to you that you would never waiver in your support of them even if it meant losing your office?

McConnell: I'll give you an example that everybody thought I was quite foolish. It was very, very fashionable 10 or 15 years ago — you're pretty young but you might remember it — it was an absolutely outrageous series of flag burnings.

Everybody was outraged about it. It was considered a disrespectful act to the country. And there was an effort in Congress to pass a constitutional amendment to prohibit flag burning. I voted against it and had to explain it to lots of veterans groups ... When I got done, I think about half of them agreed with me. I started by saying, 'Look, this is what y'all fought to preserve, and the Bill of Rights is not about protecting the majority, it's about protecting the minority.

'Every one of the Bill of Rights is related to protecting the minority actually against the majority, and offensive speech is something a free society that we ought not to be targeting.' I said, 'in addition to that, there's a practical problem because, if you look at flag etiquette, the way you destroy a flag appropriately is to burn it, so who decides what's an inappropriate burning and who doesn't?'

Frankly, there were just barely enough senators willing to oppose that to defeat it. Had the Constitutional amendment cleared the Congress, it would have cleared the states. And we would have taken a chunk out of the First Amendment for the first time since James Madison drafted the Bill of Rights. It sounds self-serving to say it, but I think it was pretty gutsy. We have a lot of veterans in this state. It was hard to explain. The easy

path would have been to go with the flow.

Pace: It's been reported you said at a fundraiser that you would not consider a vote to raise the minimum wage, but in another interview, you said you would allow a vote on raising the minimum wage if you were to become the majority leader. What is your position on the minimum wage?

McConnell: I've consistently said I'm opposed to it, both privately and publicly, and I'll tell you why. The Congressional Budget Office, an independent arm of Congress not run by the Democrats or the Republicans, said that raising the minimum wage, as my opponent and president have recommended, would cost the country between a half a million and 1 million jobs. What I have said is that I have occasionally in the past supported a minimum wage increase when I thought the economy could take it and when we could put with it some kind of tax abatement that benefits the companies that are going to be laying off the most people.

Independent studies have indicated it will cost Kentucky about 17,000 jobs. Now if you landed a plant with 17,000 jobs, it would be on the front page of every newspaper in Kentucky, including yours. I can't think of a worse thing to be destroying 17,000 Kentucky jobs than now ... I didn't say anything behind closed doors that I haven't said publicly, unlike my opponent who has been courting anti-coal people around the country ... I think (raising the minimum wage) is a bad idea. If I'm setting the agenda in the Senate, it will not be on the agenda.

Hayes: That leads into my next question about coal. It's consumed a large portion of this election. Can federal policy actually reverse the decline in Kentucky coal?

McConnell: First of all, it's good thing that America is now the No. 1 natural gas producer in the world. In all likelihood, by 2020, North America — meaning Mexico, U.S. and Canada — will be independent from an oil plot by view. But the war on coal is about global carbon emissions — put another way global climate change.

The president said, before he came to office, that he thought that was a serious problem that needed to be addressed. He tried to get Congress to pass what's called a cap and trade bill in the first two years when he had total control of the Congress — that's when he got Obamacare, Dodd-Frank, the stimulus, all the rest — (but) couldn't get it. He had 60 votes in the Senate, couldn't get it passed.

So there was considerable resistance obviously, even among democrats, to doing it. Now, he's trying to do it through the EPA, and there are two regulations. One of them guarantees that there will never be another coal-powered generation plant built in the country and the second one targets existing coal plants ... And that's why this administration needs to be stopped if at all possible ... What can we do to stop him?

The only thing that will move us in a different direction would be to change the Senate ... What we will do, if we're in the majority, is we will literally write into the bills funding the EPA restrictions on what they can do. The power of the purse is the one real power that the Congress has.

The president has a lot of latitude in our system. All these people work for him, and

he can do whatever they want to. Our way to push back against that is to restrict their funding and engage in oversight sight hearings where you call them up and say, 'Why did you do this?' and 'Why did you do that?'

We're going to try to stop the war on coal because coal will have a future. The question is will it have a future in this country. No serious person thinks coal will not be a part of the mix for a very long time.

Hayes: Should Congress pass legislation making it more difficult for U.S. corporations to move their headquarters to foreign counties as a way to reduce their tax obligations?

McConnell: Let me tell you what we ought to do. This is a potential area of agreement by the way. We now have the highest corporate tax rate in the world ... That is the quickest way to export jobs. Rather than piecemeal tax efforts to try to punish this group or punish that group, what we really ought to do is address again the issue that Reagan and Tip O'Neill addressed very effectively 30 years ago on a bipartisan basis. There was a major scrub of the tax code lowering the rates and removing a lot of the preferences. The president says we need to do it. We say we need to do it.

The biggest impediment, honestly, has been the Democratic Senate because Harry Reid and Chuck Schumer, who's like the No. 2 guy in the Democratic Senate, don't want to do it unless we turn it into a tax increase. When Reagan and Tip O'Neill agreed to do it, they agreed it would be revenue neutral to the government ... And so Reid and Schumer are saying we want \$1 trillion in scoreable revenue as a condition to do it. Well, that's not the way it was done 30 years ago.

Actually, this is an issue in which the president would actually benefit from the Senate becoming Republican because we really want to do it and we mean it.

Brown: If you're re-elected and if you become Senate majority leader, what legislation would you move through Congress that's not being dealt with now?

McConnell: Well, I just mentioned one of them. My first choice would be to see what things we can agree on with the administration. I know it's kind of counter-intuitive, but I've said this frequently, let me go over it again.

We've had divided government a lot in this country. A lot. Reagan had eight years, never controlled the House. Clinton, for six of his eight years, didn't control the House or the Senate. I'm going to mention four significant things that happened during that period that they found they could agree on ... So just because the American people choose divided government doesn't mean they don't want anything to happen. What I think they're saying is, 'Search for the things you can agree on.' A very important one I've already covered — comprehensive tax reform — the other one, the one time I stood up during the president's State of the Union was when he talked about trade.

You're in a big agricultural community here. There is no bigger winner in trade agreements than agriculture. This administration hasn't negotiated a single trade agreement in six years. We ratified three, but they were held over from the Bush administration. We did Columbia, Panama and Korea. The rest of the world is entering into trade agreements and taking advantage of the global economy. Unfortunately, after I stood up during the State of the Union, within 24 hours, Harry Reid said we're not doing trade this year.

There are two areas of potential agreement ... I will remind you that I've negotiated every deal that's been made between Republicans and Democrats in the last six years, every one of them ... I'm not opposed to dealing with the other side. All of this talk about disfunction in Washington, we have differences, but I've demonstrated on every single occasion, whether it was getting the government back up and running, raising the national debt when we had to, I've been the adult in the room on every one of those occasions.

I'm not opposed to doing business with Barack Obama. That doesn't mean I like most of what he does. I don't ... but he got elected. He's going to be there until January 2017. So my view is let's see what we can find that we can agree on and that's two things that are very important where I think there is potential common ground.

Kentucky New Era. — Serving the southern Pennyrile since 1869.

U.S. LEGISLATORS

SEN. MITCH MCCONNELL (R)
Suite 361A, Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510
(202) 224-2541
email: senator@mcconnell.senate.gov

SEN. RAND PAUL (R)
5 Russell Courtyard
Washington DC 20510
(202) 224-4343

1st Congressional District
REP. ED WHITFIELD (R)
2411 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510
(202) 225-3115

email: ed.whitfield@mail.house.gov
Field office: 1403 S. Main,
Hopkinsville, KY 42240, (270) 885-8079

STATE LEGISLATORS

1st Senate District
SEN. STAN HUMPHRIES (R)
763 Sinking Fork Road
Gadiz, KY 42211
(270) 522-0195
email: stan.humphries@lrc.ky.gov

3rd Senate District
SEN. WHITNEY WESTERFIELD (R)
P.O. Box 340
Hopkinsville, KY 42241
(502) 564-8100, ext. 622
email: whitney.westerfield@lrc.ky.gov

4th Senate District
SEN. DORSEY RIDLEY (D)
4030 Hidden Creek Drive
Henderson, KY 42420
(270) 826-5402
e-mail: dorsey.ridley@lrc.ky.gov

4th House District
REP. LYNN BECHLER (R)
2359 Brown Mines Road
Marion, KY 42064
(270) 988-4171
email: lynn.bechler@lrc.ky.gov

5th House District
REP. KENNY IMES (R)
4064 U.S. 641 North
Murray, KY 42071
(502) 564-8100, ext. 611
email: kenny.imes@lrc.ky.gov

8th House District
REP. JOHN TILLEY (D)
126 Moreland Drive
Hopkinsville, KY
(502) 564-8100
email: john.tilley@lrc.ky.gov

9th House District
REP. MYRON DOSSETT (R)
491 E. Nashville St.
Pembroke, KY 42266
(270) 475-9503
email: myron.dossett@lrc.ky.gov

16th House District
REP. MARTHA JANE KING
633 Little Cliff Estates,
Lewisburg, KY 42256
(502) 564-8100 ext. 618

CITY/COUNTY

STEVE TRIBBLE (D)
Christian County Judge-Executive
Courthouse, 515 Weber St.,
Hopkinsville, KY 42240
270-887-4100
email: cst@hopkinsville.net

DAN KEMP (D)
Hopkinsville Mayor
Lackey Municipal Building
100 N. Main St., Hopkinsville, KY 42240
270-890-0200
email: dkemp@hopkinsvilleky.us

WRITE US

Have an opinion? We would like to hear from you. We invite you to write us. Letters submitted for publication should include the signature, street address and daytime phone number of the writer. Publication of the writer's name is required. Clear, legible letters of 350 words or less on a community issue or a single subject of general interest are most likely to be published. The New Era reserves the right to edit, condense or reject letters. Write to us at:

Kentucky New Era Voice of the People
P.O. Box 729
Hopkinsville, KY 42241
Fax: 270-887-3222
Email: jpbrown@kentuckynewera.com

Submit letters online at www.kentuckynewera.com